DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 254 FL 016 393

AUTHOR Lee, William R.
TITLE Rivalry and Mutual Help among Teachers of Modern Languages: A TESOL Specialist's Comments and Speculations.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (20th, Brighton, England, April 1-4, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiovisual Aids; *Competition; *Educational Cooperation; Educational Policy; Institutional Cooperation; *International Cooperation; *Language Teachers; Policy Formation; *Professional Associations; Second Language Instruction; Shared Resources and Services; Teacher Associations; *Teacher Attitudes; Testing

ABSTRACT

Teachers of English as a second language and teachers of other second languages have numerous common problems, interests, and areas of concern. They include the use of audiovisual aids, testing issues and instruments, opportunities for second language use outside the classroom, choice of teaching-learning procedures, and problems of motivation in language learning. All of these issues would benefit from greater opportunities for exchange of teaching ideas and experiences. Language teachers can help each other and their profession by improving exchanges between teacher organizations on local, national, and international levels and among language groups. Such cooperation would help to reduce unproductive rivalry that exists between language groups and would give strength to the voice of language teachers on matters of educational policy. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

20th IATEFL International Conference - Brighton - April 1986.

ED278254

RIVALRY AND MUTUAL HELP AMONG TEACHERS OF MODERN LANGUAGES : A TESOL SPECIALIST'S COMMENTS AND SPECULATIONS

Among ideas about modern-language teaching and learning that are not so widely accepted as they might be is that, in the late twentieth century and looking beyond it to the twenty-first, children and young people should, wherever feasible, and especially in a world still trying to discover what democracy ought to mean, be offered, during their years of compulsory education and thereafter, a range and variety of foreign languages to choose from. All of us live in a culturally and linguistically varied world, which we are getting to know better and better and need to understand better.

A protest that numerous young learners are incapable of mastering even one language is both pointless and irrelevant. It is pointless since many are 'low achievers' in every branch of the school curriculum, yet are not written off on that account. It is irrelevant because the possibility of choice does not imply any increased pressure for achievement. Additionally, the apparent assumption that there are young learners who cannot learn a worth-while amount of a foreign language, not to speak of a further assumption that there are those who cannot even benefit from trying to do so, is highly questionable.

For the moment, therefore, let us think about all children and teenagers, capable and allegedly incapable, and of what they should not be denied educationally. Let us keep to modern language learning. (My remarks have no special bearing on what happens in Britain.)

We are foreign-language teachers, because (living in many countries) we teach English to learners who do not acquire English in the intimate depths of home — these depths being deeply penetrated by TV and radio. As teachers of English as a foreign language, many of our problems and opportunities are similar to those of teachers of other languages as foreign languages (French outside France, German outside Germany, Spanish outside Spain, Russian outside Russia, and so on). We face these problems and opportunities in eight or nine kinds of activity in which modern-language teachers engage.

Firstly, an area of concern to all modern-language teachers: audiovisual aids. Surely exchanges of experience and opinion here, whether on the handling or on the pedagogical exploitation of aids — the older aids (such as puppets and models, the chalkboard,

FL 016393

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

W.R. Lee

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

./...

small and large pictures, and the flannelboard) or the newer ones (such as the film projector, the cassette recorder, the overhead projector, TV and video) – can be helpful to modern-language teachers in general, regardless of the language. Exchanges of this sort between teachers of English and of French as foreign languages over the last three decades have helped forward the teaching of both: one recalls Crédif's Bonjour Line and Voix et Images de France in the early sixties and the Nuffield Project's En Avant and other audiovisual language courses later. But occasions on which teachers of English as a foreign language get together with teachers of other modern languages for this obvious purpose do not seem as frequent as they might be. Where modern-language teachers' associations inclusive of, or having a close relationship with, EFL teachers exist, this is or at least can be much less true. Nor should one forget that aids are sometimes discussed in the extensive literature on modern-language teaching in general. There is some mutual help and consultation: there could be much more.

Secondly, there is common ground in discussion of testing. What are the merits and demerits of different types of test – multiple-choice, cloze, dictation, interview, and so on? What do they test and how well? In what circumstances are they best applied? What is there to be said for trying to test language skills separately from one another? How often, at various age-levels, should written examinations be held? What about the teacher's own informal day-by-day 'testing'? Are there important outcomes that cannot be tested? Can strength of motivation be tested, and attitudes assessed? Who and what is examining for? Is there such a thing as an effective yet testing-free language course? These are questions which concern all language teachers.

Then there is the great problem of finding, or somehow creating, circumstances outside the classroom in which the learners can meet with the language in non-instructional use as a means of communication among people they can try to communicate with, whether in speech or writing. And such people are not necessarily first-language speakers of that language. So foreign-language teachers should all find common ground in consideration of the merits of journeys abroad, pen-friendships and correspondence between schools, school assistant(e)s, residential exchanges, teenagers' international camps, interviewing of travellers at airports and big stations, and other activities (additional to those in lessons themselves) which offer learners a chance of communication in the language they are learning. The problem is generally most acute with children, or where the language is seldom heard outside a single country and is not widely learned elsewhere. Heavy reliance has then to be placed on pictures and recordings which reflect the activities and speech of people in the source country who are similar to the learners. Obviously where second-language learning

is concerned, there is less of a problem, as the learners may well run into non-instructional use of the language just outside the classroom. What have teachers of other languages to say, out of their experience, on these matters?

Many language teachers will see the use of aids as no more than an aspect – though a distinctive and important one (since technology has opened up, in the more prosperous countries, better prospects for language learning) – of teaching-learning procedures. Here then, fourthly, is an even broader field of common interest. What are the advantages and limitations, the role and value, of the numerous classroom procedures that language teachers try and trust (or mistrust), such as pair and group activities, collective speaking, self-initiated dialogue or conversation, role-playing, language-games, substitution tables, guided and free composition, story-telling and re-telling (the list could of course be greatly prolonged) ? These ways and means are displayed like a menu before language teachers: one that calls for careful selection, since there are always uncertain items on it. What will strengthen and what weaken the learners' appetite for the language, what will undermine the learners' motivation, and what will strengthen their confidence and competence day by day? More than enough common ground here, one would think, for modern-language teachers to get together and exchange experience and views. And of course to some extent they do. But surely not enough.

It is widely recognised that motivation, with both failure and success playing positive and negative roles, lies at the root of progress in language learning. Fifthly, therefore, here again one might suppose that the various branches of the profession would have much to offer one another. Motivation in language learning is a subtle and complicated matter on which comparatively little research has been carried out. In view of its importance, surely modern-language teachers should try to pool their knowledge and experience of it. Discussion within the profession as a whole of research on motivation to learn particular languages in particular circumstances could also help to illuminate the general picture of the forces at work. Teachers can contribute from experience of teaching at different age-levels and levels of progress, and in all sorts of teaching-learning circumstances with all sorts of learners – and not least by suggesting what additional research could be done in which they might take part.

So much for what language teachers have in common, though doubtless there is much else. What do they <u>not</u> have in common? The crude answer is of course the languages themselves – that is, the languages they try to teach. A less crude answer would concede that languages resemble one another, some more than others, and therefore that there is common ground in this circumstance too.

./...

But with time ebbing away, we can't look into that. I shall now conclude by attempting an answer to two questions: one – given this common ground, how can foreign-language teachers help one another and the profession to which they belong?; and two – on what issues can and should they make common cause? I shall also comment, in passing, on certain aspects of rivalry among modern-language teachers.

The first of these two questions I see as a matter not only of 'Where there's a will there's a way' but also of administrative orientation and contrivance. Getting together in personal chats-over-coffee style with language-teaching friends and acquaintances in the same school or neighbourhood is one thing, and manifestly that can be a creative thing to do and (one would think) not at all difficult. Out of it may spring a local discussion group with a programme of regular meetings and in due course contact with other groups. So it need not be a dead end, even if it gets trammelled by rules of procedure, but may well shed fresh light (for those belonging to it) on familiar teaching problems. Quite another thing is the activity of established associations of language teachers. Often these begin as regional or national (occasionally as international) associations of teachers of a single language, and even when they do not, show a tendency to break up into language sections which exist side by side. I hope I'm not exaggerating.

What can a national or regional association of teachers of one foreign language do, in practical terms, to explore common ground creatively with associations of teachers of other foreign languages (let's call them 'single-language' associations) ? A great deal. It can exchange bulletins or journals: publish news of their activities; arrange for joint meetings on themes of common interest; offer 'guest room' at some of its conferences to another single-language association; invite teachers of other languages to take part in or chair a debate or panel session on certain topics. With this sort of co-operation striving to be born, a first topic could simply be: 'In what ways can we help one another?' Certainly in no ways if either organisation regards itself as self-sufficient in ideas, but in many ways if both acknowledge the existence of the common ground and are ready to re-explore it. Mutual help need not consist solely of open-minded discussion but can also take the form of co-operative projects; for instance, building up a stock of pictorial aids, the establishment and assessment of bilingual mutual help procedures (X-speaking learners of language Y helping Y-speaking learners of language X and vice versa); and joint research (as I have suggested) into classroom teaching procedures employed in common (add here testing procedures). All this calls for careful planning. One purpose of such activity is to make the best of collective modern-language teaching know-how. An equally important purpose is to help create mutual respect and fellow-feeling within the modern-language teaching profession.

In the midst of this argument, rivalry can be seen to rear a disapproving and discouraging head. Why should we help with the teaching of other languages? At the root of the disapproval is often worry about employment. Two outstanding examples: in Britain there has been more and more teaching of French and in many schools French is the only possibility as a first foreign language, so teachers of German, Spanish, and other languages feel excluded; and in Europe generally there is a similar situation as regards English: it is the foreign language very much more on offer than the others - so what if one has studied to teach French or German as a foreign language, or Italian or Spanish or anything else? There are many many fewer jobs. Nor are teachers the only ones to be dissatisfied with this state of affairs: parents and students often are too.

But rivalry has still deeper roots in cultural self-awareness, in awareness also of the contribution made by study of a language and its associated culture to learners' knowledge of the world and attitudes towards it. Why only French and the ways in which the French look at life? Why only English, and British and American and Commonwealth attitudes? And so on. We should not forget either the importance of English as a means of expression for a great variety of countries - for example in Africa and the Sub-Continent - where it is virtually a first language for many people; nor of course its use as a vehicle of science and technology and commerce world-wide.

Children and young people need a range and variety of modern languages to choose from, notwithstanding the extra (and in places outstanding) importance of several of them. We live in a linguistically varied world; we always did, but nowadays it is very much more closely drawn together than in previous centuries: we are more keenly aware of other peoples, languages, and cultures, and they are increasingly accessible as potential sources of cultural enrichment, and of mental and (dare I use the word?) spiritual stimulus. And all this, as I see it, has something to do also with the more rational and vital forces of democracy. Let there be the opportunity of choice, and let as many flowers as feasible blossom. Perish prescription. As for rivalry, surely we can do better than that.

Co-operation among modern-language teachers is not limited to neighbourhood or national activity, but can and does have an international (indeed, a world) dimension. Possibilities here are similar in kind to regional possibilities, except that international meetings cannot be held quite so often, and this restraint means that local meetings (at which you confer with people facing local problems you are more or less familiar with) have a unique role to play. But so have international conferences. People may be drawn in to these from very widely differing parts of the world, and this fact is especially relevant where languages of widespread use, such as French, German, and (especially) English, are concerned,

since their very internationality brings with it special problems. Making clear as a first step that one's professional concern with, for example, English does not imply hostility towards the teaching of any other languages, one can then go on, in a co-operative atmosphere, to exchange ideas over an even greater range of topic areas and teaching experience than is possible in a purely regional or even national context, and these exchanges can take place both with national multilingual and with international unilingual organisations of language teachers. International conferences of applied linguists are held fairly often, but international conferences of practising teachers of different languages are remarkably few, language teachers preferring on the whole, it seems, to keep themselves to themselves, within the bounds of a single language or closely knit group of languages. This is indeed a pity, and not only from the point of view of exchanging ideas and arguments on common language-teaching aims and procedures. In an even broader perspective, can we of today afford not to get together, at least within our professions, and muster up such tolerance and understanding of one another as we can, in our dangerous end-of-century world? At least we cannot afford to put our heads down and pursue only the language-teaching concerns and purposes we have grown up with and perhaps contributed to, half blind to the existence of others. Co-operation and compromise are urgent demands.

Governments do not take a great deal of notice of language teachers, but large (and preferably world-wide) organisations of language teachers, who have obviously solved some of their internal differences, speak with a stronger voice than small ones, and are more likely to be listened to internationally on language-teaching policies. When such organisations make common cause, their united voice is stronger and still more difficult to ignore, and common cause can be made on several basic matters, among them the provision of modern-language learning as an essential element in school curricula for everybody, and the provision for children and young people of choice among modern languages. Ours is a multilingual world, which has to learn to live in harmony with itself. And there is no place in it for policies of denial or domination in language teaching.

April 1986. W.R. Lee.